Popular Authorship Reconfigured: Stephen King's Authorial Personae from Print to Digital Environments

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Abstract: The convergence of literary practices with computer information technologies (ICTs) has immensely affected writing processes and theories of authorship. This paper aims to foreground contemporary sociocultural conditions which have reconfigured authorship in relation to the materiality of the product through the example of Stephen King's writing and marketing choices. An investigation of selected printed and digital works, including *Misery*, *Lisey's Story*, *Duma's Key*, and *UR,* showcases King's concern for the future of authorship in the digital age and the position of the writer in the book and entertainment industries. This article seeks to trace the trajectory of the concept of the author who is seen moving from print to digital environments and being entangled in new forms of communication with the reader. In particular, King, who leaves control of the narrative story to experts in digital mediation, takes advantage of the new medium's immediacy, comes closer to the recipients of his works, and manages to re-invent his authorial image while his name turns into a brand.

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1. Introduction

The concepts surrounding authorial processes have always depended on socio-cultural and technological conditions, which, in turn, have had an effect on developments in writing practices. An overview of the origins of oral-formulaic tradition of the West, the creation of highly-malleable manuscripts, and the more permanent inscriptions of alphanumeric imprints on the printed medium after Johannes Gutenberg's invention of print indicates that the author's place in literary production has always been intertwined with developments in the technologies of writing. Furthermore, printing and distribution changes in tandem with the advancements in digital technologies since the 1990s have entailed the involvement of media artists and other professionals, resulting in the molding of different types of collaborative authorship and a further redefinition of the author's role in the writing process.

It is the purpose of this essay to explore the multiple convergences resulting in the configuration of contemporary authorship theories. Initially, my synopsis of traditional authorial notions aims to contribute to a better understanding of the intersection between authorship and writing technology. More specifically, this essay will explain how the latest interdependencies between developments in writing technologies and popular writing have reconfigured authorial

practices in the digital age. The transformation of the idea of the once-lone writer into an industrial asset is traced with special focus on Stephen King's authorial practices as he turns from print to digital production. To start with, the analysis showcases the position King saves for his characters posing as writers and creative agents in some of his written works produced for the printed medium and then moves on to examine King's own role in the writing and dissemination processes for the creation of products designed to be accessed digitally.

2. Techno-cultural Convergences and Collaborative Authorship

According to media theorist Lev Manovic, in his fascinating investigation *The Language of New Media* (2001), after the revolutionary sway caused by the advent of photography in the nineteenth century and the subsequent emergence of modern media, such as film and television, in the early twentieth century, the world was in for "a new media revolution – the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication" (19). The shift from alphanumeric and analogue systems to digital ones and the subsequent digitization of every bit of information have shaped a new media culture where multiple convergences are enabled. "Convergence culture" is a key notion coined by media and culture theorist Henry Jenkins to describe the complex interrelations between participating agents and texts working for this emergent new media culture. In his milestone *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006), he explains that by "convergence," he means "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (2). Within this fast-evolving media consciousness concepts of authorship and collaboration are continually being informed with new meanings. Within the workings of the new media culture, and without turning a blind eye to the socio-political and economic variables, this essay suggests a technologically-informed concept of collaborative authorship that takes into consideration the multiple convergences among writing practices and developments in authorial relations following technological innovations.

The controversy concerning notions about the solitary writer as opposed to concepts regarding multiple authorship since the Romantic and the Victorian era is thoroughly examined by Jack Stillinger in his book *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (1991). In his engaging investigation, Stillinger makes it clear that "multiple authorship – the collaborative authorship of writings that we routinely consider the work of a single author – is quite common, and that instances […] can be found virtually anywhere we care to look in English and American literature of the last two centuries" (22). M. Thomas Inge agrees with this realization in his article "Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship":

> It is commonplace now to understand that all texts produced by authors are not the products of individual creators. Rather they are the result of discourses that take place among the writer, the political and social environments in which the writing occurs, the aesthetic and economic pressures that encourage the process, the psychological and emotional state of the writer, and the reader who is expected to receive or consume the end product when it reaches print. (623)

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He points out that we should not "constantly downgrade authors according to the extent to which they compromise with the pragmatic and economic forces of time and place" but insists on "a social and contextual concept of authorship" (630). As Manovic also contends,

> collaborative authorship is not unique to new media: think of medieval cathedrals, traditional painting studios which consisted from a master and assistants, music orchestras, or contemporary film productions which, like medieval cathedrals, involve thousands of people collaborating over a substantial period of time. In fact, in [sic] we think about this historically, we will see collaborative authorship represents a norm rather than exception. In contrast, [the] romantic model of a solitary single author occupies a very small place in the history of human culture. ("Models of Authorship" 1)

Despite systematic efforts to foreground a romantic model of authorship with the writer/creator posing as the solitary genius in both present literary tradition and media industries, ideas about collaborative authorship as a relational practice among writers and texts were expressed by John Milton as early as the seventeenth century. More specifically, according to Milton in *Areopagitica,* the writer should "be inform'd in what he writes, as well as any that writ before him," as he "searches, meditats, is industrious, and likely consults and conferrs with his judicious friends (qtd. in Dobranski, "The Birth of the Author: The Origins of Early Modern Printed Authority" 33). The practice of patronage as a market system attributed authority and market value to the author while the visibility of early print technology enabled name recognition of the writer and established the identity of the writer "as the organizing principal for classifying and interpreting a book's content" ("Birth" 39). Yet the inability to see the writer as a professional has delayed the shift away from a romantic perception of writing and its creator. According to James West, a great problem that has set back the maturation of concepts regarding the role of the writer is the fact that the writer has traditionally lacked professional status in British and American society despite having to produce a sellable commodity in order to survive within the economic market. Although in 1790 a copyright law officially gave to literary writing the status of a marketable and profitable property in the U.S., the writer continued to be regarded more as a craftsman than a professional, often "walking the line between art and commerce with great skill and success" (21). Since the Early Modern patronage system the idea of the writer as the writing and organizing mediator has developed, first, into the author as a skillful writer and from there to a successful businessman trying to survive in the present book and entertainment industries, of which King's written production and marketing ploys form a striking example.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, and in the light of the second media age, concepts regarding authority, authorship and collaboration had to be legally redefined due to the demands of the entertainment industries to readjust legislations and secure their rights in the new digital market. Since then the convergence of literary practices with information computer technologies (ICTs) has caused the incorporation of image, sound, video and hyperlinking in the "literary text." This electronic boom, resulting in the digitization of the written text, has brought about new forms of textuality and literary products, such as digital

fiction writing on demand for specific e-readers and transmedia storytelling,[1] leading to new forms of authorship.

More specifically, the convergence of new technologies with contemporary popular writing has forced popular writers to adjust to the latest technological and commercial conditions in order to redefine themselves and their place in the production practice in highly interactive and participatory online environments, while concepts such as originality, authority and intertextuality are also being recontextualized. The "modern scriptor" ("The Death of the Author" 145-46), who has traditionally been responsible for the organization and enunciation of his or her writing, experiences further distancing from the artwork when moving from print to digital environments and remains nothing but the source of an idea for a work that will see its materialization in new products by a new authorial team. This is because in new media practices, between the work and its writer, a whole new network of professionals intervenes for the enunciation, distribution and marketing of these creations. Besides, emphasis on the audio-visual richness of the digital experiences and the kinesthetic pleasures involved shifts interest away from the writers' pen and the experiences that the word can create.

Yet, rather than see writers in digital environments left weak and stripped of their power to build their fictive worlds on words, Diakopoulos et al. regard the author in a "remix society" as a "Constraint Satisfier," who has to reconcile "production constraints" – while making choices about the content and structure of the elements used within a particular medium – with "environmental constraints," such as design, social norms, legal and economic facts ("The Evolution of Authorship in a Remix Society" 133). Such constraints reconfigure the author, the product, and the reader as they are constantly re-adjusted and re-invented due to the incessant development of the media through which digital information streams. Contrary to the illusion of permanence, which print favors because of the stability of alphanumeric symbols, in digital environments, "[t]he thoughtful voice of the author is subverted through the rearrangement of decontextualized fragments or through the limitations of a software platform which dictates the medium's autonomy" (134). As this essay suggests, popular authors working in electronic environments are asked to reconcile literary tradition and technological innovation in strict economic structures. Ultimately, succumbing to technological and economic constraints results in the branding of their names and their products in digital environments.

3. Stephen King's Changing Authorial Faces

This section seeks to trace the trajectory of the concept of the author, moving gradually from the medium of print to the electronic medium after an investigation of King's latest publishing and marketing policies in contemporary socio-cultural conditions which have been affecting the materiality of the product and, which, in turn, have redefined the role of the author. I also examine the changing roles involved for the contemporary popular writer, working within the western consumer society by discussing how some of King's well-known characters evolve and mature in the fictional worlds that he builds for them.

As one of the richest American writers today, with an enormous body of printed fiction and a profound eagerness to experiment with other media while testing their narrative

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[1] Jenkins's explanation of transmedia storytelling involves "a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story." It can be accessed at his official website *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*.

potentials, King manages to confirm his professional status and his ability to adjust to commercial laws and technological advancements. Despite his profound professionalism, corporate promotional and marketing policies tend to support the rather romanticized concept of his writing as craft and the writer as the craftsman who manages to survive the pressures imposed on him by the market due to his true devotion to writing. Oftentimes, King's self-reflexive stance towards his own production habits in printed and live interviews aims to reinforce his authorial identity by painting a rather conventional picture of an author. In his essay entitled "On Becoming a Brand Name," King comments on his writing choices: "In writing popular, commercial fiction, there is nothing but danger. The commercial writer is easy to bribe, easy to subvert, and he knows it [....] But if this is true, it also means that the commercial writer who can tell the truth has achieved a great deal more than any 'serious' writer can hope for; he can tell the truth and still keep up with the mortgage payments" (16). He insists that his bulky production of fiction and his involvement with different media is not strictly profit-driven. Rather "it's about trying to see the act, art, and craft of writing in different ways, thereby refreshing the process and keeping the resulting artifacts – the stories, in other words – as bright as possible" ("Practicing the (Almost) Lost Art" xi). Despite the accusation levelled at him that his writing policies are largely commercially driven, This statement explains King's efforts toward a change of course in his writing career, starting in the 1990s. Since then, the alterations in his writing formulas and the need for his redefinition as a writer through his contact with the electronic medium have been immense. As the exploration of King's works from print to digital textualities will suggest, he can be seen to gradually turn from being the writer and the creator of fictional worlds and heroes to being the originating source of ideas for copyrighted material and, ultimately, allowing himself to turn into a brand name.

King has been experimenting with the idea of authorship through his writing all along. As revealed by Stephen P. Brown in "The Life and Death of Richard Bachman: Stephen King's Doppelganger," King had tried pseudonymity in the early stages of his career. Wishing to resist the production limitations imposed by publishers on his work, King invented the persona of Richard Bachman in 1977 and used it as a way towards recognition for some of his works, such as *Rage* (1977)*, The Long Walk* (1979)*, Roadwork* (1981)*, the Running Man* (1982) and *Thinner* (1984), which would have had little luck next to his other bestselling novels of the time, such as *Carrie* (1974), *Salem's Lot* (1975) and *The Shining* (1977). In particular, Brown sees King's resort to an alternative authorial persona as "simply the vehicle for King to move his earliest work out of the trunk" (132). This practice might be translated as a secure way of revealing another side of his writing talents to the public, while waiting to see the marketing results. What is more, his editor Kirby McCauley sees it as mere genre distinction and King's way to secure his supernatural horror novels from other horror fiction (132). Yet, for King, this resort to a hidden persona was his refuge from demanding publishers and markets. As he confesses, "Bachman was where I went when I had to have relief ("Why I was Bachman" ix). Despite Bachman's early death of "cancer of the pseudonym" in 1986 with the question, "is it work that takes you to the top or is it all just lottery?" (xii) still unanswered, King's authorial persona has never ceased evolving and seeking answers.

The concept of authorship in a consumer society that poses constraints on the creative process as well as the writer's relationship with his readers are among the main concerns expressed in King's both earlier and more recent fiction. The consuming appetite of the book industry and the public is so great that his fictive authors are often depicted in his printed novels as unstable entities who desperately seek self-awareness and ultimate self-fulfillment through the writing process. King has always placed his characters in situations of immense stress while

he has watched them grow in their fictive universe. They have always been open to critique by their creator while receiving both physical and psychological violence exercised against them either by their supposed fans or by their critics. It is through them that King has attempted to explore the vulnerability of authorial nature, the limitations of the writer's profession and the fear of being consumed within a society where the artistic product has to meet the standards set by conglomerates and the entertainment industry. Through the linguistic games that he plays, the characters' "official" language comes into dialogue with intervening thoughts and the "unofficial" ungrammatical language of criminals and minorities, leaving the fictive writers exposed to the readers. As my investigation further suggests, by exploiting the multiple personas, voices and registers of his heroes in multi-layered narratives in the presence of old and new media, King manages to take advantage of the multi-vocality that the writing medium enables and to test the limitations of his profession.

Misery (1988)*,* inspired by a real incident with a deranged fan, is one instance of his earliest fiction where King discusses the dangers lurking for a writer who refuses to take heed of the tastes and demands of the consuming society. Paul Sheldon is the popular writer who is maliciously abused and amputated by Annie, the female fan who saves him from a car accident and confesses to being his "number-one fan" (6), a declaration that is ironically repeated by both the writer and the fan eight times in the novel. After learning that Paul had killed off Misery, the main character in his last novel, in order to turn to crime fiction, Annie gets tremendously agitated and reveals her deeply disturbed nature. The typewriter that had been the traditional medium for authors' written creations turns into a double-edged sword, threatening his existence unless it is used for the right purpose. However, eventually, it becomes the instrument that kills off his prosecutor and secures his freedom and autonomy as a writer.

Many years later, in *Lisey's Story* (2006)*,* King kills off Scott Landon, a popular writer and Lisey's husband, right from the beginning of the novel, but his adventures and problematic nature come alive through her narration. Landon's lunacy is gradually revealed and emphasized in the novel in order to comment on the fragile nature of writers*.* The writer is the lunatic who is paid to write about his delusions and putting them onto paper is his "craft – that is how he refers to it in his lectures, never as his *art* but as his *craft* – as delusion" (292, emphasis in original), emphasizing thus the technical aspect of the writing. The half-sane half-lunatic famous writer is abused both by the academic world and by his fans. After his death by a "*graduate student madman*" (22, emphasis in original), the academics who are portrayed as vultures, "the Incunks, those pagan worshippers of original texts and unpublished manuscript" (233) keep persecuting his wife in order to make her submit his written treasure to them. His fans prove fatally dangerous, while Lisey's efforts to protect him are in vain: "if she were kept out, the crowd might kill him. Kill him with its dangerous love and voracious concern" (28). Lisey, who is left responsible for clearing out his writing place after his death, also becomes the victim of a dangerous fan as she is captured and violently mutilated by him.

Artistic creativity as "otherness" is another notion with which King has experimented. At times, it takes the form of an otherworldly power that consumes the artist as is the case in *Duma Key* (2008) with Edgar Freemantle, a former construction businessman, whose second dangerous nature soon emerges after an accident at a construction site. His "othering" experience is supported by the narrative structure of the novel, which is divided into two main but distinct narrative strands. In the main story, Edgar explains in first person how he was mysteriously drawn to the seclusion of Duma Key in Florida after his accident and left with a damaged scalp and minus one arm. His mysterious missing right arm becomes responsible for producing paintings which are able to affect people's lives and even kill them. Rather than

constitute a soothing and liberating experience for Edgar, artistic creation resembles "a violent explosion" (105) with disastrous consequences. This superimposition of an unearthly power questions the origins of artistic creation and the hero's talent in painting and serves as a general metaphor for the questioning of authorial identity, originality and freedom in artists and authors like King himself. On a second narrative level, there are twelve short sections scattered throughout the novel, falling under the title "How to Draw a Picture." They tell the story of Elizabeth, narrated in third person by Edgar, who now as a painting instructor gradually reveals all the information about Elizabeth's mysterious past. These sections serve as explanatory notes for all the mysterious incidents taking place in the main narrative. Both narrative strands showcase the ways in which the story and its characters can intersect so as to generate multiple points of view, gradually pointing to multiple readings. The multiple narrators, focalizers and focalized objects are taken as diverse "mediums" through which the writer communicates his story to the reader.

As King's foremost concern seems to be the way his fictional worlds are constructed, his narration is not restricted to the *verbal* code supported by the printed medium. By contrast, he also incorporates the representation of other media in his printed texts so as to enhance the textual experience he offers to the reader. Songs, movie scenes and TV presenters commenting on news heard in the background are given a "voice" of their own, contributing their own perspective to the stories narrated as part of the main narrative. As a result, multiple levels of narration are created, adding up to the multivocality of the novel and functioning as additional layers to the main textual thread. The presence of diverse media in the story hints at the digital multi-mediated environments in which the contemporary popular writer has to create. At the same time, the persistence of supernatural elements in the narration, taking over when Edgar is in his creative frenzy, contrasts with the writer's tendency to introduce elements inspired by digital writing textualities, such as emails and emoticons. By merging diverse genres, mediating voices, media and writing technologies King enhances the reading experience and prepares the reader for the visual and sensual richness of his narrations and representations intended for the digital medium. Last but not least, criticism of the "'potential patrons'" characterized as "lookie-loos" (157) and the art critics in the novel, those "art snobs," who you can pick [...] out by their black clothes and teeny-tiny cell phones" (160) reveals King's ironic disposition towards present marketing rules of artistic production, while his persistence in commenting on such issues proves his genuine authorial stance in the contemporary literary scene.

Moving from the printed medium to the electronic one and conceding with the writer's possible "freedom of the tyranny of the line" – echoing Robert Coover – new authorial practices are enabled as a whole new set of narrative possibilities seems to affect former roles and interrelations. King's reflection on the author's/ creator's role as expressed in his printed novels turns into an active exploration of electronic textualities. His experimentation with new media does not stop with the adaptation of print stories into films, audio books, comic series or graphic novels. Since issuing *Riding the Bullet* on demand as a Scribner e-book in 1991, in order to promote the up-and-coming e-market, King's resort to the electronic medium for writing, marketing and distributing his work has been staggering. This time the real-life writer seeks his redefinition through his interaction with new digital media. Simultaneously, his fictive writers are also seen entering a process of self-questioning and self-realization through an interactive relationship with the electronic medium.

The intersection between the two opposing but complementary fields, the printed and the digital, is projected in *UR* (2009), King's first short story, created and released solely through and for the e-reader Kindle. Restricted by its copyright policy, *UR* has been available only in

electronic form and only to the users of this particular computerized product, introduced to the literary market by Amazon. It deals exactly with this reterritorialisation of literary writing, since it was produced in order to specifically fill and promote the new space created by contemporary digital media. As the reading of the e-story demonstrates, not only has technology affected the choice of the enunciative medium the writer employs but it has also affected the content of the story. It is a clever story which combines King's well-known ingredients for success, including fantasy, mystery and romance, but this time put forward through the medium of the Kindle, an electronic device that in King's story can access multiple realities and change them.

The story begins with the hero, Wesley Smith, who is an English instructor and book-lover, after his break up with Ellen Silverman, the coach of the girl's basketball team at college, following their quarrel over the long-standing controversy between the book and the computer tradition: "The books were the problem. That, and the fact that he had called her an illiterate bitch" (Kindle Locations 135-136). His decision to buy a Kindle "out of spite" "to get back at her" (177) but also to win her back proves disastrous after his horrifying realization of the great potentials of this new electronic device. Far from being a simple "gadget" (2) or a "new toy" (8), the pink Kindle he buys turns out to be a scary widget that has the power to connect to innumerable multiple realities and predict the near future. In the story, Wes represents "Old School" (278). Wes "loved books. Books were his Achilles heel" (136-7), while Ellen, who represents "New School," is characterized as "an illiterate bitch" (135), reminding us of the distinction between "high" and "low" in art. Interestingly enough, King does not fail to point out that Ellen "*was* illiterate, or close to it" although "[s]he certainly wasn't computer illiterate" (165-9), thus accentuating the controversy between the two writing technologies.

The Kindle is represented in the story as a universal machine controlling authorial intention. Every time Wes chooses an Ur, an infinite number of both known and unknown unpublished works by distinguished writers comes up. Even the *Collected Works of William Shakespeare* appear in the hypertextual list along with two new plays, while birth and death information about the writers often appears to be misleading:

> What convinced Don Allman was the *Collected Works of William Shakespeare* from Ur 17,000. After downloading it at Don's request—because in this particular Ur, Shakespeare had died in 1620 instead of 1616—the three men discovered two new plays. One was titled *Two Ladies of Hampshire*, a comedy that seemed to have been written soon after Julius Caesar. The other was a tragedy called *A Black Fellow in London*, written in 1619. (Kindle Locations 751-755)

No fixed authorial identity is secured in the Kindle's reality, since each new search produces different findings. The Kindle confuses important information and attributes new, different book titles to authors while it curiously fails to include others. The feelings of surprise and awe that overwhelm Wes reveal the sense of anxiety for authorship, author identity and originality as experienced by contemporary writers at a time when the electronic medium is taking over. Obviously, King hereby underscores the pressures the industry puts on writers and their written works by making use of the technology available to them.

As regards King's online presence, the creation of *Stephenking.com* (1998) has facilitated the promotion of his work and of his self-image on the web. However, his involvement with new types of writing textualities has caused the emergence of a new authorial persona. While he remains the source of inspiration for all the projects running on his official website, their success

necessitates the collaboration of a number of experts in digital mediation. *Stephenking.com* has been designed by Brian Stark and a network of computer experts, while King has remained the executive producer of the whole project. It offers a new space for his work to be remediated and hosts diverse instances of transmedia storytelling and online computer experiences, hoping to answer to the corporate need to repurpose King's written content into digital form and then to reload it in diverse formats made available on the internet. It manages to create a new, broader sense of the narrative experience for the online reader by employing a number of tools provided by computational, hypertext and multi-media technology.

The projects in hypertextual organization work as narrative threads interconnected by means of links that create multiple realities for the web user. As it seems, the new potentialities that digital technology brings create new textual formats that require the active involvement of more agents than the writer. Additionally, the free online space enables more direct methods of communication between the writer(s) and the readers/ users, limiting the distance between them, while enhancing the readers' interaction with new forms of textuality. Accepting changing labor and authorial relations, King takes advantage of the new medium's immediacy, leaves the multi-/ transmedia narration of the story to webpage and media experts, and comes the closest he can get to his fans, thus keeping an always fresh and re-invented authorial image.

King has always tried out the potentials each medium offers. As he admits in a message posted to his fans on his website in answer to the closure of *The Plant* (2000), the online serial novel, "[p]opular entertainments have a place on the Net, but finding the most efficient ways to make them work is a trial and error process" ("The Plant: Getting a Little Goofy"). The online serial novel, which came to a closure after only five-monthly installments, served as an experiment that hoped to test the readers' response to the writer's work being downloaded and paid for directly on the internet. As stated by the *New York Times* editors, the seeming democratic nature of the medium which allows access to all material on the web proved destructive, since "where all the trees stand more or less the same height, even Mr. King can be hard to see" [….] 'The Plant' withered mainly because its author misunderstood the nature of his readership" ("King's Closure"). Despite the challenges arising and the integral problems involved in using the internet for the distribution of fiction, King claims that he is willing to face them: "The point is trying some new things; pushing some new buttons and seeing what happens" ("Plant"). Apparently, his website poses as the right space for immediate contact with the readers and offers opportunities for the clearance of misunderstandings and the advertisement of forthcoming events and new releases. This way King works on his self-image by maintaining the idea of the author/ creator of the work in digital environments while keeping the relationship between author and reader alive.

In hindsight, the intricacies related to authorship and authority issues in and out of print do not allow for hasty conclusions. The materiality of the platform used for the production and distribution of the digital texts does not only condition the design of the new product or its content as the discussion on *UR* and the writer's official website has suggested. On the contrary, the role of the author and his relationship with other mediating participants and fans undergo further changes, moving towards new forms of interactivity and participation while in the writing and reading processes. Hopefully, resorting to novel writing textualities helps the writer keep on his search for self-realization and self-assertion through artistic innovation.

4. Brand Naming the Author: "Stephen's Empire"

Umberto Eco's optimism about the future of literary writing on the Web and its peaceful co-existence with the printed form sounds reassuring: "I do not see how the fascinating game of producing collective, infinite stories through the Net can deprive us of authorial literature and art in general. Rather, we are marching towards a more liberated society in which free creativity will coexist with the interpretation of already written texts. I like this. But we cannot say that we have substituted an old thing with a new one. We have both" ("Vegetal and Mineral Memory: The Future of Books"). Despite the allegations of a liberating distribution of information and artistic expression available on the web, potentially modified by readers, turning them into co-creators in the artistic practice, the dream of more democratic authorial processes has yet to materialize. As Stephen Donovan, Danuta Fjellestad and Rolf Lundén point out in their introduction to the volume *Authority Matters: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Authorship,* "[c]orporations' economic gains undermine the utopian dreams of democratization of authorship through the new technology" (14). Contrary to Eco's dream that electronic textuality would enable a more flexible relationship with authorial artistic creation ("Vegetal") and Coover's earlier optimism about "true freedom from the tyranny of the line" ("The End of Books"), Donovan, Fjellestad, and Lundén express their concern that within a capitalist system, where the branded product and the profit gained constitute the driving forces behind marketing choices and creative practices, the literary product cannot and has not escaped such forces. At this point, John Caldwell's study of the creation of the industrial identity in film and TV production can also prove useful for the realization of the complicated corporate practices in popular writing within convergence culture. He contends that "all screenplays are also business plans" and "branding opportunities" (232) while producers "serve as profitable 'signature' focal points for companies, seeking profits via critical distinction awards" (234). When it comes to popular writing in new media reality, all creative products and projects, ultimately, also march out as promotional and marketing policies in transmedia storytelling.

King has always realized the power and the realism that the branded product offers to his fiction and has skillfully incorporated it in his narrative. Brown admits that "King is famous (or infamous, depending on which critic you listen to) for his use of the brand-name detritus of modern culture. Throughout his work, he invokes the names of our most familiar household products in a way that deepens the intense realism of his best fiction. Over the course of years his fiction has also turned into a branded product. In a wry acknowledgement of his own omnipresence in our daily lives, King uses his own brand name in *THINNER:* 'You were starting to sound like Stephen King novel for a while there . . .'" ("Life" 143). King is careful to attach his name to the literary product in the same fashion as all branded products make themselves seen and known. In the same way that the brand of a product becomes its trademark with the aim of advancing sales, his name has turned into a brand, assigning value to the corresponding literary product. Although the digital product's fluid nature hinders categorization, the indexical reference to the name of the writer helps the classification of the work for marketing purposes and bookstore or online library conveniences. Therefore the writer fulfills his classification "function" ("What is an Author")[2] while his signature, seen as a means for securing authentication, also assigns "sign-value" to the work of art. As Jean Baudrillard notes about the

[2] For Michel Foucault "the name of an author is a variable that accompanies only certain texts to the exclusion of others" (124).

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role of the signature in painting, it adds "differential value" to the product and allows it to be recognized (*For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* 102). Always in relation to other artifacts, the work of art secures its meaning by differentiating itself from existing or future ones by means of the artist's signature. Baudrillard states that "[i]t becomes the veritable caption of our oeuvres. In the absence of fable, of the figures of the world and of God, it is that which tells us what the work signifies" (105). In *Duma Key,* King challenges such a totalizing view of the artist's signature. Through his first-person narrator, he does not fail to make an ironic comment on the ambiguous nature of his signature in his artistic creations: "I had signed each of the oils in the lower left corner, just as neatly as I has signed all invoices, work orders, and contracts in my other life: *Edgar Freemantle"* (159). The signatures on both textures are paradoxically equated, attributing both "sign" and "exchange" value to the work of art which acquires the status of a marketable product.

As he accepts his new authorial roles in digital mediation, King appears to become distant from his products to the point of his ultimate fading away behind his signature on his branded products. Nevertheless, his authorial identity is paradoxically reinforced as all instances of collaborative writing seem to be highlighting his name as the originating source behind the project. "Stephen's Empire," an online project released in 2010, constitutes an instance of manipulating the advantageous presence of the writer's name in digital textualities, where the signature and the artist's name ultimately converge and, working like a trademark, assign symbolic value to the work. In an online newsletter to his fans, King admits being "hungry – not for food, but for power" and urges his fans to email and caption photos from real environments connected in some way with King's worlds and works ("Stephen's Empire"). The photo gallery with the top shots projected on King's website is intended to satisfy his "insatiable appetite for grandiosity" ("Stephen's"). The storylines that are narrated through the pictures connect the fans' real world to King's fictional world. By trying to blur the boundaries between the two, they seek to resituate the online narrative experience in real space and blur the boundaries between the writer's fiction and the users' reality. King's name, acting as a signature, performs its indexical function and authenticates the project while through its repetition it resembles the function of a brand. The advanced visibility of the electronic medium enhances the recognition of the writer's brand and the multiple narrative threads created by the collection of the fans' shots can showcase how the writer/ creator can disappear, leaving his name as the only indicator of the branded product.

5. Conclusion

This essay has underscored the need for the recontextualization of contemporary authorial concepts and processes in both print and digital environments after taking into consideration the new realities brought about by writing, technological and marketing convergences, and by shifting focus onto the corporate efforts for the industrial branding of authorship in new media culture. By discussing King's both writing techniques and marketing policies this investigation has sketched the development of the role of the writer within diverse forms of textuality. The multiple authorial practices discussed testify to the emergence of a whole new world of potentialities emerging when discussing notions such as authorship, authority and freedom in print and electronic environments.

More specifically, as this study shows, King has acted as the "mediator" of the writing who produces according to the medium employed and manages to re-invent his image and his writing during the process. Given the diversification and multimodality of digital textualities, the

role of the writer is constantly being re-invented, while the visibility of new media gives the writer's popularity new dimensions with his name standing out as the product's brand or trademark. Due to the new narrative possibilities that the digital medium can offer, new, potentially creative roles have emerged for all the participants in the communicative process, taking place in immersive environments that can include both the creative agents and the recipients of the products. The text is viewed as a living organism, an indispensable part in a system of constantly evolving and mutating relations readjusted according to the medium of expression. In such fluid contexts, the inevitable death of the author as the omniscient creator triumphantly marks his re-birth as a colleague, co-star, co-producer and co-worker in a technologically-determined consumer society.

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